

The Ulster Literary Theatre

Rutherford Mayne

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THE Programme of the Golden Jubilee Performance on the 27th of December last year brought a nostalgic memory of what happened in Belfast in that same month fifty years ago.

The 8th of December, 1904, dates the birthday of the Ulster Literary Theatre. The programme of the performances announced the first production of two plays, *Brian of Banba*, by Bulmer Hobson, and *The Reformers*, by Lewis Purcell. The names of the players were not given. [There was a rule that names of players should not be given on programmes. It was not abolished until some years afterwards.]

The programme set out however a note on the aims of the Society—“To produce literary and artistic plays and to encourage in Ulster a school of writers and actors of such plays. All who are interested in the development of a native art are invited to become members or subscribers.”

This sounds like a faint echo of the appeal made some years before in Dublin by the leaders of the new movement in Irish Drama that had already given birth to *Kathleen ni Houlihan* and *The Riders to the Sea*.

But this Belfast programme note read more like an appeal to found a provincial school of drama confined to Ulster. However a magazine named *Uladh* on sale that evening provided the information supplemented by a talk with Lewis Purcell.

There had been previous productions in Belfast by the same company or some of them two years before, of *Kathleen ni Houlihan*, *Æ's Deirdre* and *The Racing Lug* by Seumas Cousins. The plays of the Irish National Literary Theatre Society had been produced by W. G. Fay's Irish National Dramatic Company in 1902.

Bulmer Hobson and Lewis Purcell went up to see Fay's productions. The Fays had been very kind to them. Dudley Digges and Maire Quinn of that company promised to come to Belfast and assist the two young

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men to give performances of *Kathleen ni Houlihan* and another play, *The Racing Lug*. These were duly given in St. Mary's Hall, Belfast, in 1902, and a year later the company unaided reproduced *Kathleen ni Houlihan* and Æ's *Deirdre*.

Uladh refers to these performances and candidly admitted they were bad, and that everybody except the Dublin players had everything to learn. Some explanation seems necessary for the adoption of a new title, and of a provincial approach to the creation of a national drama.

Apparently objection had been taken over some announcement of these earlier productions as being given by "the Ulster branch" of some one or other of the literary or dramatic societies and companies in Dublin. The rent of the halls, hire of scenery, advertisements, royalties, etc., had resulted in a deficit.

Gerald MacNamara many years afterwards humorously remarked, "There was a deficit. It was willingly—in fact joyfully paid by the members. At this, the darkest hour, a brain wave settled on the President who proposed 'that the Theatre should be "floated". The floating "consisted of sending out prospectuses inviting the public to send in subscriptions (limited to a guinea) for which they could gain admission to the performances. There was a response—one gentleman sent in five shillings which was returned a few years afterwards when the Theatre had gained a sound financial footing.

After this failure, the Theatre Committee, being Ulstermen born and bred, determined to cut down expenses by writing their own plays and so save the authors' fees. Two plays, *Brian of Banba* and *The Reformers*, both written by members of the Theatre, were produced. I might add that no royalties were paid to their authors by the Ulster Literary Theatre if they were members until after 1916, and then only if there was no loss incurred.

In 1905 the Theatre moved to the Clarence Place Hall in May Street, where they produced *The Enthusiast* by Lewis Purcell and *The Little Cowherd of Slaing* by Joseph Campbell.

Forrest Reid in his survey of eighteen years work of The Ulster Players (*Times Irish Supplement*, 5th December, 1922), wrote describing a visit to a rehearsal of *The Enthusiast* "My first acquaintance with the Ulster Literary Theatre as it was then called, was made under the wing of Mr. W. B. Reynolds. The accomplished composer and musical critic at that time, the beginning of 1905, edited *Uladh*, a short-lived quarterly . . . and if the pages are not wholly pathetic today it is principally because they reflect the bravery of revolt—revolt against the tyranny of commercial materialism which weighed upon our native city and in the shadow of which we have been

all brought up. Reynolds who was an idealist, revolted more than anybody. He saw too with the eye of faith and on the strength of a couple of slender local comedies was already discussing architectural plans for the new theatre and devising schemes for a building fund. It was to no such Temple of the Muses however that he brought me this damp dark night of January or February, 1905, but a house in May Street, and there in a brightly lit and extremely chilly backroom upstairs I watched a rehearsal of *The Enthusiast*.

“This was eighteen years ago, yet it is all perfectly clear to me as I write. I remember Padraic Colum chanting in my ears Yeats’s new poem, ‘The Happy Townland’, and a parody of another Yeats’s poem, ‘I hear the bad old, old men say’. Fred Morrow was stage managing, and W. R. Gordon was there, and Bulmer Hobson and John Campbell, the black and white artist, who played the part of Sam McKinstry and Jack Morrow . . . as the enthusiast . . . Rutherford Mayne, who had the part of Rob, the servant man, was not present, but James Good came in later, and John McBurney who, with Parkhill, Reynolds and Good, did perhaps more for the cause of art than anybody else. Of the acting, I remember principally Willy Gordon’s very fine interpretation of William John McKinstry, the old father, but the whole thing was a revelation to me it was so fresh, natural and new—and I felt that Reynolds after all had not exaggerated its importance. I still believe *The Enthusiast* to be a genuine work of art—slight—imperfect—but vital—in one way more vital than anything the Ulster Theatre has done since, for we must remember that from it sprang the more significant of the only two forms of drama it has as yet mastered—folk comedy and fantastic farce.”

I fully agree with Forrest Reid. It was *The Enthusiast* that opened the road to success for the Ulster Theatre with the folk plays afterwards. The delight of playing “Rob” in *The Enthusiast* with those fine actors, Willy Gordon, John Campbell and Jack Morrow, with Margaret O’Gorman (Bridget O’Farrell), will ever remain in my memory. Whatever success was achieved by writing *The Turn of the Road* was due to Lewis Purcell’s help and advice.

Joseph Campbell’s poetic play, *The Little Cowherd of Slainge*, was based on a legend of the Mourne Mountains about a magical cowherd who lures to her death the daughter of one of the chieftains of Mourne. There was certain promise in it of the later beauty of his work in the *Mountainy Singer*.

In 1906, Purcell, who was forever on the move to new fields of drama, wrote *The Pagan*, and I finished my first play, *The Turn of the Road*. The first production of these two plays was given in the

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College Hall at the Queen's University on the invitation of the Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Hamilton. Laurence Lynd, brother of Robert Lynd, was instrumental in getting these productions there. He was then I think, President of the Queen's College Gaelic Society. Purcell's *Pagan* was, in my opinion, one of the finest contributions made to the Ulster Theatre. Forrest Reid described him as the "artistic conscience" of that theatre, and I fully agree.

He dates his play to "the sixth century," and it gives a very clear objective view to what the coming of Christianity meant to warlike tribes in Ulster and their chieftains, and clansmen and serfs. The very beautiful designs of costumes for Nuala, daughter of Cromall Ruadh, and Gorman McRory, chieftain of the tribes of the McNial and the Crinthni, designed by John Campbell, and as worn by the artist and his sister Josephine and Sam Bulloch, attracted the delighted attention of artists in both Belfast and Dublin.

I wonder often what happened to them. It was revived quite recently by Radio Eireann, and I thought the play came over as fresh as when I first heard it. I recollect W. B. Yeats and Lady Gregory coming in after its production at the Abbey in the following year (1907), and expressing their admiration of John Campbell's costumes.

In December, 1907, at Christmas time, the Theatre made the most daring and audacious attempt in their history. To anyone who knows the city well, it might easily have had the same result as throwing a lit match into a barrel of gun-powder.

Suzanne and the Sovereigns was produced at the Exhibition Hall. It was completely unlike any other play hitherto staged by the Society.

The names of its principal characters, and some idea of their importance, are set out on the ballad sheets that served as programmes:—

WILLIAM THREE. A hero king

Brave and kind and good-looking.

JAMES THE SECOND. For him see

Note above on William Three.

SWEET SUZANNE. A maiden fair

Pearly teeth and golden hair.

LUNDY. Traitor, villain, spy

Bold and bad and very sly.

with more rhymed couplets of other leading figures of the Battle of the Boyne period, and a deputation from Belfast arriving in Amsterdam to the strains of Lillibulero. The result was a complete triumph.

There was a repetition given in January the following year, 1909. It is interesting to find an acknowledgment to Whitford Kane for his loan of

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costumes for this revival of the play. He was instrumental in bringing Ulster plays and players across the Irish Sea to England and later to America. I am proud to say that a young barrister who later became one of the best known Judges of the Northern High Court replaced me in my former part on this occasion.

The Ulster Theatre gave its first performance in Dublin at the Abbey Theatre in 1907, with *The Pagan*, and *The Turn of the Road* on the Saturday of Holy Week that year. At that period I think Miss Horniman owned the Little Theatre and gave it to the Irish National Theatre Society for their productions. When they were not occupying the theatre, it was let by Cramer Woods to other societies or persons whose temporary occupation would not injure the prestige of the Society.

Lewis Purcell went as advance agent for the Ulster Literary Theatre to book a date at the Abbey Theatre if possible. The two plays produced in Belfast had been extremely well received. Padraic Colum and Maurice Joy had been up to Belfast previously and seen performances there of which they wrote appreciatively. George Roberts of Maunsel and Company, the famous Dublin publishers, was considering publication of the plays after the Belfast productions, but thought it desirable that they should be presented to a Dublin audience in the first instance.

Purcell came back and told rather an amusing story of how he found that by some oversight The Irish National Theatre Society had not reserved Easter Week—which is one of the best weeks of the theatrical year—and he had promptly booked that week for the Ulster Theatre and then went to see W. B. Yeats. The result being that Purcell managed to get the Abbey Theatre for the Saturday night of Holy Week.

There was a small but very representative audience present: Yeats and Lady Gregory, Seumas O'Sullivan, George Russell, the Fays, and most of the famous Abbey Theatre Company. *The Playboy of the Western World* had been produced only a few weeks before and the commotion had hardly died down. The welcome we received that night was such that it was decided to give the Ulster Theatre's new plays, *The Leaders of the People* and *The Drone*, their first production in Dublin the following year.

1908 was a memorable year in the history of the Ulster Theatre. The production of the new plays which were given at the Abbey Theatre received a remarkable reception from both the public and the press.

The Leaders of the People was a modern play dealing with the clash of party politics with political idealism, and though finely written failed

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to achieve popular success. *The Drone* followed a more familiar furrow and achieved immediate success, and continued for many years afterwards in the repertoire of the Ulster Theatre. Both plays were repeated in Belfast later that year. Meantime, Whitford Kane had induced me to join the late William Mollison's Shakespearian Company, and Mollison gave a first production of my play *The Troth*, in London. This company on its then tour included *The Troth* in its repertoire and produced it in Belfast, Dublin and Cork. It was a peasant tragedy in which Kane gave a fine rendering of his part in it and led to his subsequent productions of Ulster Theatre plays in England and later in America. (Ref.: ARE WE ALL MET. By Whitford Kane. Elkin Matthews. 1931).

In the January of 1909, the Ulster Theatre gave its last production in the small halls of Belfast. It staged a revival of *Suzanne and The Sovereigns* again at the Exhibition Hall for which Whitford Kane lent his costumes. Fred Warden, the well-known managing director, offered the company a date at the Opera, and that theatre became its home for almost thirty years afterwards.

In 1909, I obtained employment with the Land Commission and left to spend over 40 years in its varied history, most of that time west of the Shannon, and never again resided in Belfast, though I managed to keep in touch when on leave at odd intervals. The outstanding work that marks the further history of the Ulster Theatre was accomplished by Gerald MacNamara aided by Lynn Doyle.

MacNamara's plays mark a brilliant epoch in that period and established the Ulster Literary Theatre as a company that excelled in his fantastic burlesques. *The Mist that does be on the Bog*, the famous *Thompson in Tir na nOg*, *The Throwbacks*, *No Surrender*, *Thompson in Terra Firma*, *Fee Faw Fum?* and other amusing skits.

His high water mark was reached in *Thompson in Tir na nOg*, first produced at the Opera House in Belfast, 1912. The adventures of the little Orangeman when accidentally hurled into "the Land of Everlasting Youth" to meet the heroes and heroines of Gaelic mythology, never fail to render any Irish audience almost helpless with laughter North or South of the Boyne.

Lynn Doyle contributed in 1913 *Love and Land*, and later *The Lilac Ribbon*, and *Turncoats*. They are all delightful examples of this writer's keen sense of humour and characterisation. They rank amongst the Theatre's most successful productions.

There were in addition other writers such as C. K. Ayre in this period who achieved success with their work.

I regret so little has been written here about this later period which is

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important to note in any survey of the Ulster Theatre.

By the time the Ulster Theatre had reached its 21st birthday in 1925 it had probably reached the maximum of its attempt to achieve the aims of its founders.

Jas. Winder Good remarked in *Uladh* 50 years ago, “The Ulster Theatre may never produce an epoch-making play or evolve a distinctive school of acting, but if it aids, even a little, in breaking down the barrier that has so long divided the North from the South, its work will not have been done in vain.”

Meet Rutherford Mayne

'The Bellman'

(pseud. of Larry Morrow)

The Bell, IV, 4 (November 1942), pp. 241–48.

Only the highbrows among the Irish playgoers will remember an exquisite-ironic little two-act play produced in Belfast in 1915 by the Ulster Theatre and entitled *The Spoiled Buddha*. It was the first play of that delectable Ulster author, Helen Waddell, and was later published by the Talbot Press with, apparently, such disastrous results that stacks of it are even now to be found 'remaindered' in the Dublin second-hand bookshops at tuppence a copy. (Why?).

I am reminded of this play for several reasons; not least, because it in some ways suggests another Ulster author of distinction who is best known by his pen-name of *Rutherford Mayne*. For Rutherford Mayne is the Spoiled Buddha of Ulster, if not the Irish, Drama—the man who, but for the fact that for many years he has been forced to lead a double life here in Dublin, might have given us the best plays of his generation. Even that not over-subtle critic, Stephen Gwynn, has detected this, and has written in his *Irish Literature and Drama*: 'Work of Rutherford Mayne's has been seen in later years at the Abbey; but none of it prevents the feeling that his author has never taken his own talent seriously enough to give it the full expression which cannot be achieved without hard labour.'

'Even so—remembering *Bridge Head*—one reflects that it's not yet too late—if only Rutherford Mayne can be brought to take his talent seriously—if needs be, given hard labour.' For *Bridge Head*—when the history of the Irish Theatre comes to be written a century hence—may well occupy a place equal in importance to that of *The Playboy*, since, like Synge's masterpiece, it is one of those Plays which Pointed the Way. It may well be the foundation of a school of Plays by Men about Their Own Jobs.

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But the resemblance with the Buddha doesn't end there. It's a physical resemblance as well. It isn't however, the immobile, shiny chrysoprase Buddha of Mr. Ernest Blythe, but a jolly ultra-human, heroic-sized Buddha, like the Buddha of Miss Waddell's play—a Buddha of flesh and good red blood, with a bright blue twinkle showing behind the almond eye-holes. And with it a six-foot frame and at least sixteen stone in weight. The straight, brush-like hair is still thick—in spite of the playwright's sixty-three years. The Etruscan-red complexion is the red of good earth, heavily ploughed in deep, furrowed wrinkles in which, you feel, you could sink your fingers. There is a flaming sunset look about this immense man—a feeling of the heroic executed in burnished bronze that the early Epstein or the late Rodin could have cast superbly—even to the massive, grasped hands. With a great, brazen voice like a gong, and a laugh like a typhoon, to complete the impression of something somewhat larger than ordinary nature.

I found the playwright in the unlikely setting of Foxrock where anything-but-magic casements open suburbanly on to the anything-but-perilous seas of Dublin Bay, and houses—in spite of Mr. Michael Scott—are still known as 'The Firs.' In a setting of ormolu, brass-and-lacquer-work, corner cupboards, rare delph and pottery, chintzes, cretonnes and pewter, I found the playwright—rising like a sunrise over Mt. Fuji, like 'thunder' across the bay. As I came in, he rose from his chair, coming forward with outstretched arms and a smile like a slice of ripe cantaloup, seeds and all. One felt a sudden rush of dynamism to the head—as if, were those hands to descend on one's shoulders, one would crumple, as under the collapse of a tall and soundly-constructed building. The great gong-voice boomed a welcome.

It was only as one settled in the deep chair that one began to notice that the Buddha-like colossus was in—strange to relate—a state of unease, the unease of an actor who knows he's going to 'fluff' his lines and is preparing himself for the worst. A handkerchief—large as a napkin—was produced to mop the forehead. A white, lime-like deposit of dried saliva was just faintly noticeable on the lips—a nervous parching that afflicts the public speaker who is stupid enough to overrate the intelligence of his audience. It was plain—or was I wrong?—that my appearance had produced in the playwright a state which can only be described as one of genial dither. The white sail was once more raised to the forehead in what might well have been a symbolical gesture of capitulation.

'Perhaps, Bellman,' sounded the gong, a little uncertainly, 'perhaps you'd be the better of a little refreshment?'

‘You read me like a book,’ I answered, not altogether untruthfully, and so—in precisely the time it takes to pour out and drain a couple of glasses of a very excellent liqueur-whisky—we were refreshed.

‘And now,’ I began, hopefully, ‘tell me the real reason why The Ulster Players . . . the Ulster Theatre—whatever you call them—why did they disappear off the face of the earth?’

The playwright looked at me—a sudden dart of a glance. Suddenly the cantaloup smile became the inverted crescent.

‘The simplest of all reasons,’ he said after a pause. ‘They never could raise sufficient funds to build a theatre of their own. There was one time—it must have been well over thirty years ago—when we launched an appeal for funds on the lines of a Drama League. The only response we got from Belfast—or anywhere else—was a man who sent a subscription of five shillings, and afterwards asked for it back. I think you could safely put down the decay of the movement to the simple fact—that we never had a theatre of our own.’

And the playwright heaved a sigh as of Atlas laying aside the globe for a space.

‘The early history of the Ulster Theatre Movement—if I may say so—seems to have been highly confused—much more confused, say, than that of the Abbey. Why was that?’

‘I suppose,’ and the far-off blue eyes glinted behind the heavy tortoise-shell spectacles, ‘I suppose,’ because the movement itself was a bit confused. Round about that period—say, from 1902 to 1904—there were all sorts of people and groups experimenting with the Drama in the North. It was started by a visit of Dudley Digges and his wife to the St. Mary’s Hall, Belfast, to act in a performance of *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* and James Cousins’s *The Racing Lug*, which was given by a local society describing itself as “The Ulster Branch of the Irish National Theatre”—which was, of course, something which didn’t exist at all, and that dissolved into thin air as soon as questions were asked about it in Dublin.

‘As you know, Belfast isn’t a very big city, and it was even smaller in those days. So that, somehow or other, soon all the people interested in the idea of an Ulster Drama managed to come together. The driving spirit was a young Belfast architect, David Parkhill—his pen-name as author of *The Reformers*, and *The Enthusiast*, and so on, was “Lewis Purcell”—and round him gathered Jack, Fred and Harry Morrow, John and Joseph Campbell, Jimmy Good, Paul Henry, J. A. Power, Walter Riddall, Robert Lynd and myself. We produced *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* and Æ’s *Deirdre*, and with a shocking lack of originality, we also described ourselves as “The Ulster Branch of the Irish National

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Theatre.” No sooner was the show over than we got an indignant letter of protest from the Irish National Theatre *plus* a demand for royalties from Yeats and Æ. It was that demand for royalties that caused the birth of the Ulster Literary Theatre, for it drove us to write our own plays, instead of acting other people’s and having to pay money for them.’

And the playwright let loose, once more his hurricane of a laugh. ‘Most of us,’ he went on, ‘got our inspiration from Parkhill. There was nothing southern about it—in spite of our fraudulent claim to be associated with the Irish National Theatre. Parkhill’s first play, *The Reformers*, was followed by plays by Bulmer Hobson and Joseph Campbell. It was in Parkhill’s second play, *The Enthusiast*, that I blossomed out as an actor and got notions about playwriting. *The Enthusiast*, you see, was the first realistic play of Irish rural life I’d ever seen. That was in 1906, mind you—long before T. C. Murray and the realistic school of the Abbey had begun to blossom out. As far as a realistic interpretation of contemporary Ireland was concerned on the stage, the Ulster Literary Theatre was a long way ahead of the Abbey. And that’s something that the literary historians don’t always seem to remember—for some reason or other.’ And, the playwright keeled an eye an me over the rim of his spectacles—whether in sorrow or irony, it would be hard to say.

It was time to take a closer look at this outsize man of genius who by day occupies one of the most important jobs in Ireland’s new Government and who by night—if he’ll forgive me—apparently decides that he’ll put off settling down to that new play until tomorrow, next week maybe. And one notices the lines of decision on the face—the lines that meant so much in the struggle within himself of the high-placed Government official with a genius for playwriting which, alas! he was afraid to trust. There’s a restlessness about the man—the restlessness of vast untamed vigour and almost leonine strength—and an uneasiness about him that only those who know of his double-life know how to explain away. A curse on the Civil Service!—you mutter. But the Buddha only smiles, though a trifle inscrutably this time.

‘I wish more people in the south and elsewhere knew more of the early days of the Drama Movement in Ulster. It was a real moment in Irish history. It was the first time that Ulster had ever seen itself on the stage. But—as I’ve said—there were snags in the way. We never managed to raise enough money to start building a theatre of our own, and, besides that, don’t forget that even to the end—ten or twelve years ago—we were always under a bit of a cloud.’

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‘It’s the sort of thing that’s always happening in Ulster. It’s happening even today with Denis Ireland’s Union Club. After all, when you’ve a flaming Nationalist like Bulmer Hobson or Joe Campbell or Francis Joseph Biggar as a member of your society, it takes a lot of explaining away. There wasn’t much of Caesar’s Wife about us—even at the start. And that suspicion—although it wasn’t always apparent—meant a good deal more than most of us cared to admit. But the suspicion was there—all the time.’

‘Tell me, Rutherford Mayne, how would you define the Ulster sense of humour?’

The playwright pursed his lips thoughtfully before answering.

‘I should say—superficially at any rate—that it’s mainly concerned with de-bunking. Irony. Sarcasm, almost—if you like. An appalling sense of realism—a simply *appalling* sense of realism—and an utter and violent distaste for platitudes...

‘But surely—what about “Ulster will Fight” and all the old party slogans like—’

‘I was coming to that,’ said the playwright, putting me gently in my place. ‘I was about to say—in *spite* of those platitudes which, curiously enough, bore no relation whatever to the everyday life of the Ulster people. You get what I mean by appalling realism in those stories of low life in Belfast that Denis Ireland tells so well—especially the one about the two men coming away from the political meeting where they’d been addressed by a bearded dignitary of the Church. “Man,” says one of them as they came out, “Thon wee hairy man spoke very wicked.” It’s the use of the words “hairy” and “wicked” that make all the difference between the North and South. You got what I mean by de-bunking in Gerald MacNamara’s *Thompson in Tir na nOg* and his *The Mist that does be on the Bog*. Perhaps there’s a good deal of malice in it. Sometimes, it’s ... it’s hard to say.’

And once more I found it difficult to determine whether I was being gazed on in sorrow or in irony.

‘It might interest you to know,’ went on the playwright after a pause, ‘that Gerald MacNamara was *commissioned* to write *Thompson* by the Gaelic League. But when the MS. was sent to them, they turned it down.’

‘Whatever for?’

‘Because they said it ... it ...’ and the playwright lowered his voice to a stage-whisper that could have been heard somewhere about the summit of the Three Rock Mountain, ‘—it made fun of the ancient Irish heroes.’

(*Short interval for refreshment.*)

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'If I may say so, Rutherford Mayne—your own work as a playwright seems to be divided very sharply into two almost hermetically-sealed compartments—your early plays about Ulster farm-life, like *The Turn of the Road*, *The Drone*, *The Troth* and so forth; and the later plays, like *If*, *Industry*, and so on, culminating in what most people regard as your masterpiece—*Bridge Head*.'

'It's curious you should mention *Bridge Head*—because it's the play of mine I like least of all.'

'But surely—?'

'You've no idea what an amount of sweat that play cost me. I don't think it'd ever have been finished if it hadn't been for a constant year's nagging by Lennox Robinson. You owe it all to Lennox.'

'But what I'm trying to get at is this curious, sharp division among your work—almost as if the two different types of plays had been written by two different playwrights. Was that effected by your translation, shall we say, from North to South or, rather, from North to West?'

'I'm afraid I . . . don't see it. I'm afraid I can only see my plays as pieces of a whole. Some of them I like better than others, that's all. And, as I told you, I like *Bridge Head* least of all.'

'And when are you going to give us a new play?'

'I've promised to write a play about young people,' began the playwright. 'You'll remember, *Bridge Head* was mainly about old people.'

'Yes,' I began, emboldened, em-Powered, as you might say, 'and so were *The Drone*, *Peter*, *Industry*—all your best plays. Why bother to write about the young? They have no real tragedy. They don't know the meaning of Life or Death. And anyhow, did you ever come across an Ulster author who, when he came to write about the young and their love-affairs and what-not, didn't make a complete mess of it? Take St. John Ervine . . . take yourself, for instance.' The cat was now well out of the bag and leaping up and down the carpet.

'I mean to say,' I hurried on, 'it's something congenital with the Ulster character. It's something you simply can't help. There hasn't been a single Ulster author—with the exception of Forrest Reid—who has ever been able to put a convincing young man or woman into a play or a novel. It . . . it must be their appalling sense of Realism.'

'Perhaps you're right,' said the playwright a little ruefully, 'I must think over it.'

'And when you're thinking,' I said bullyingly, 'you might consider giving us a sequel to *Bridge Head*.'

'Maybe,' said the playwright, indulgently. But I felt it was the

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indulgence of someone who has already made up his mind to break his promise. But maybe I'm wrong.